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ABSTRACT

This survey was undertaken to provide information about the fate of young children (0-5 years) admitted to the care of voluntary societies. Data, collected from the files of three large voluntary societies, included information about all children admitted in 1962, 1963 and 1964. The movements of the children were followed until December 1968. None of the children had been received into care with the aim of adoption. By 1968, 37%-46% of the children were restored to mothers and relatives (percents vary with race and reason for admittance). Half of the children placed in foster care were adopted by foster parents. Between 1/4 and 1/3 of the total population would probably have to grow up in a child welfare institution. Predictions based on information from the survey indicate that infants over six months old, boys and colored children are less likely to be either adopted or restored. In recent years, a different pattern in the number and age concentration of admissions has occurred, thereby rendering results of this survey partially outdated. However, colored children continue to be the most difficult to place. Expansion of preventive services is presently being undertaken to reduce the number of young children admitted to residential care. (WY)

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"Todays Foundlings".

A survey of young children admitted to the care of Voluntary Societies in England.

The voluntary societies in England have a long tradition of providing care for deprived and homeless children, and today despite the growth of local authority services their contribution is still substantial. However, Packman (1968) has shown that there are marked differences in the characteristics of the children in local authority and voluntary society care. The principal reason for admission to the care of the local authorities is the short term illness or confinement of the mother; the proportion of illegitimate children growing up in local authority homes is small. The voluntary societies, by contrast, admit few short stay children, and much of their work is concerned with helping the unmarried mother and her child. There is, however, little information available about the fate of these children. How many are eventually restored to their mothers, or adopted, and how many are destined to grow up in institutions or foster homes? Can one predict from a knowledge of the age, sex and colour of the child, and the reason for his admission to care, who will be looking after him in five years time?

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As part of their current reappraisal of their contribution to child welfare Dr. Barnardo's Society has supported a number of research projects, in one of which, summarised below, an attempt was made to answer these questions. Information was collected from the files of three large voluntary societies about all children under five years of age admitted to their care in 1962, 1963 and 1964. The movements of the children were followed until December, 1968. Comparable information about young children in the care of Children's Departments is not available.

An important function of the voluntary societies is to act as adoption agencies, but none of the children with whom we are concerned were received into care with that aim. These were children who it was hoped would later be restored to their families, or who were not accepted by the societies for immediate adoption because it was believed that either their colour, their family history or their own medical status would make an adoption placement difficult.

What kind of children were admitted?

Of the 3,055 children under five admitted in 1962 - 1964, 57% were boys, and 27% were coloured. The exact number of children who were of mixed race is not known, but there is evidence that more than half of the coloured children had white mothers. It should be noted that the proportion of coloured children in care at any particular time is considerably larger than the proportion admitted, since as will be shown they tend to remain in care for a longer period.

The principal reason for admission was illegitimacy, recorded in 60% of cases. Other much less frequent reasons for admission were the break-up of a marriage because of divorce, separation or desertion, (15.7%) the long-term illness of a parent, (7.8%) and neglect or cruelty by a parent, (3.2%.) A much larger proportion of coloured children than white were admitted because of illegitimacy, a difference associated with the large proportion of coloured children admitted under the age of six months. Over the age of six months the reasons for admission of white and coloured children were very similar. The ratio of boys to girls (57:43) was the same amongst white and coloured children, and also amongst illegitimate children and those admitted for other reasons. A little more than a third of the sample (38%) had sibs in care, and most of these children (76%) had been admitted for reasons other than illegitimacy.

Almost a half of all the under fives admitted during this period were under the age of six months on admission, and 91% of these babies were illegitimate. The biggest single group admitted was therefore illegitimate children under the age of six months. Table 1. shows that illegitimacy remained the most frequent reason for admission until the age of two, and the second most frquent reason until the age of five.

It is often suggested that the voluntary societies are concerned with children from a "better" social background than those in the care of the local authorities. Information on the social class of both sets of parents is not available on a national basis, but the results of a limited survey do not support the suggestion. In a study of 85 two to five year olds in eleven voluntary society nurseries it was found that the social class of nearly a third of the mothers and nearly a half of the fathers was unknown or

unclassifiable. In the remaining cases classes 1, 2 and 3 were underrepresented, and class V was overrepresented, in comparison with the census for London and S.E. England.

Fostering

It is not the custom of the voluntary societies to place children directly in foster homes. Only 9% (N = 278) of the sample were placed initially in foster homes, the rest were admitted to residential nurseries or branch homes. Most of those (75.5%) placed directly in foster homes were under six months of age, and most (87.3%) were illegitimate.

After a varying period of time in an institution many more children were placed in foster homes. In all another 26% (N = 778) of the sample were fostered within the three year period. The children most likely to be fostered were white illegitimate girls admitted under the age of six months (55% of them were placed). The group least likely to be fostered were coloured boys, admitted over the age of six months for reasons other then illegitimacy (1.4% of them were placed). The significant variables

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determining whether a child was fostered or not were illegitimacy (42% of illegitimates were fostered, but only 8% of those admitted for other reasons) age at admission (46% of those admitted under 6-months were fostered, but only 13% of those admitted over 6-months) and sex (38% of girls were fostered but only 32% of boys). The proportion of white and coloured girls who were fostered was the same, but significantly fewer coloured boys were fostered than white boys (37% of white boys were fostered, and 31% of coloured boys).

Age at first fostering. Most of the children who were eventually fostered spent a more or less protracted period in a residential nursery before placement. The group most likely to be fostered, illegitimate children admitted below the age of six months, were also fostered the earliest, but less than half of them (43%) were placed before their first birthday.

Indeed, 19% of the boys in this group were not placed until after their second birthday. The average age of fostering for children admitted before six months was 15-months, and of those admitted after six months, two years three months.

Success and Failure in Fostering. By the end of three years 11% of the children placed in foster homes had been moved to another foster home or to an institution. More coloured children than white children failed; by the end of five years 7% of white children had been moved and 23% of coloured children. Sex and reason for admission did not affect success in fostering, but both age at admission to care and the age at fostering were significant variables. Children admitted under the age of six months were more likely to succeed than those admitted later; but if one considers only children admitted before six months, then of those fostered before their first birthday fewer failed (only 6%) than of those fostered after their first birthday (15%). If a child failed in a foster home he was not usually placed again. Only 4% of all children fostered were tried in a second foster home, and only 0.2% in a third.

Number of moves. Because only a third of the children are fostered, and very few are placed in a second foster home, most of the children in the care of the voluntary societies have, geographically, a fairly stable early childhood. At the end of five years 87.5% of the 1962 admissions had been moved not more than once, either to another institution or to a foster home. (Adoption or restoration to the child's natural parent or family is not considered a move in this context). But 5% of the children (N = 52) had moved between three and eight times. Most of these children were not illegitimate. They were admitted to care somewhat later than the other children from very unstable homes; in most cases the series of moves included one or more temporary restoration.

Adoption as an outcome of Fostering. At the end of three years 14% of the whole sample had been adopted, and at the end of five years 18% of all the children admitted in 1962 had been adopted. It should be remembered that the survey did not include children admitted specifically for adoption. 95% of those adopted were adopted by their foster parents: in many cases the fostering had been arranged with a view to adoption. Of the 1,057 children

placed in foster homes 38.79% had been adopted at the end of three years; of the 1962 samplo 53% of those fostered had been adopted at the end of five years. White children were much more likely to be adopted than coloured children, and white girls were more likely to be adopted than white boys; ooloured girls however, were not adopted significantly more often than coloured boys.

Most of those adopted (83.5%) had been admitted to care before the age of six months, and most of those adopted were illegitimate (92.3%). However, a lengthy period usually ensued before adoption took place. Of those admitted to care under the age of six months, 45.1% were not adopted until after the age of two. The sex and colour of the child did not affect the age of adoption. Most of the children placed had been considered ineligible for adoption during infancy, whilst most of the adoptive parents, because they were often middle-aged and already had children of their own, would have been considered ineligible to adopt an infant.

Fostering and the voluntary societies. Whilst fostering is the type of care most favoured by local authorities for babies and young children, only 35% of under fives admitted to the care of voluntary societies were fostered during this period. Moreover, as a rule the voluntary societies fostered only one particular group of children, that is illegitimate children admitted in the first few months of life. Only 13% of young children admitted at or over the age of six months were fostered.

Fostering, when it occurred, came later; the mean age for fostering children originally admitted below the age of six months was fifteen months. Moreover, much of the fostering arranged by the voluntary societies led to adoption; over a half of all the children fostered had been adopted by their foster parents at the end of five years. It would appear that fostering of under fives in the voluntary societies is in the main confined to very young children who after a period spent in a nursery were seen to have little or no contact with their mothers. No single reason for

this difference in practice between local authorities and voluntary societies can be adduced. In discussion, the administrators of the voluntary societies, whilst approving fostering in principle tend to lay more emphasis than do local authority officials on the difficult relationship that may develop between the natural and the foster mother, on the right of the mother's wishes about fostering to be respected, and on the damage to the child of a fostering failure: some also tend to be less critical of residential nursery care. Moreover, since foster parents for the voluntary societies must be practising church members it is no doubt more difficult to recruit them in large numbers.

The practice of rearing children in residential nurseries for the first year or two of life, and then fostering them perhaps with a view to adoption, is contrary to current theories of child development. It would seem important to study the development of these children, and the experience of their adoptive parents. More important perhaps would be the reappraisal which is taking place in some voluntary societies of their services to unmarried mothers. Some mothers would have kept their babies, given adequate day care; in other cases an earlier decision that the mother was unlikely ever to take her baby home, or a less cautious approach to the problem of placing children of mixed race or with less than perfect family histories would have led to earlier placements.

Who goes home? How successful are the voluntary societies in returning children to their families? It is no longer true that children admitted to care can look forward to a life-time of institutional upbringing. At the end of three years 37% of all children had been restored to a relation, and at the end of five years 46% of the 1962 admissions had been restored. However, not all children stand an equal chance of being restored. 48% of white children, but only 38% of coloured children had been restored at the end of five years. 62% of children admitted because of desertion of a parent, parental illness etc, had been restored, but only 34% of illegitimate children, The children least likely to be restored at the end of five years were illegitimate coloured boys who had been admitted under the age of six months (22%); the children most likely to be restored were white boys admitted for reasons other than illegitimacy after the age of six months (65%).

In general illegitimate children, particularly coloured illegitimate children, are less likely to be restored than others, and the earlier the illegitimate child was admitted the less likely he was to be restored.

Who are the children who grow up in institutions?

At the end of five years a quarter of all the children admitted in 1962 were living in institutions. Coloured boys, whatever their age of admission or reason for admission, were the children most likely to remain in institutional care (40% of them did). These were the children who were least likely to be adopted or restored. Coloured girls on the other hand, were much less likely to remain in institutions (only 22% of them did so), because they were more often restored or successfully fostered. Illegitimate white girls admitted under the age of six months were the children least likely to remain in an institution (only 12% of them did so) because so many of them were adopted.

A third world within the child care societies?

The current aim in child care practice is to retain or restore the child to a stable family environment. By the end of five years nearly two thirds of the under fives admitted to the voluntary societies in 1962 had been either adopted or restored to their parents, and this proportion remains fairly constant for both boys and girls, for illegitimate children and those admitted for other reasons, and for those admitted before the age of six months and those admitted later. However, this satisfactory outcome was enjoyed by less than half of the coloured children (47%) compared with 70% of the white children. The coloured child entering care is out of luck; but this is even more true of the coloured boy, Coloured girls do not get adopted, but a quarter of them were in foster homes; no-one seems to want the coloured boys, and at the end of five years 40% of them were still in institutions. Most of these boys were illegitimate. There is evidence that the problems of these children growing up in institutions for the most part with no family contacts, and no contacts with the coloured community, become very acute in adolescence.

This account of the work of the voluntary societies with under-fives is already partially outdated: very recently, the number of illegitimate infants for whom admission is sought has dropped sharply, and their places are being taken by slightly older babies and children. These children, because they are often not available for adoption, but are difficult to restore to disturbed or rejecting families, present even more serious child-care problems. Coloured children continue to be the most difficult to place, and large numbers of them seem destined to grow up in institutions. Current thinking in both voluntary societies and children's departments is increasingly concerned with an expansion of the preventive services, so as to drastically reduce the number of young children admitted to residential care. It will be some time before the feasibility and effectiveness of these attempts can be assessed.

Packman, J. (1968). Child Care. Needs and Numbers. Allen and Unwin.

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Table 1.

Main reasons for admission to the voluntary societies before the age of five.

Age at admission.	Illegitimacy.		Divorce etc.		Parental illness.		Parental neglect.		Parental Death.	
	N.	%.	N.	%.	N.	%.	N.	%.	N.	%.
0 - ½	1350	73.9	39	8.1	32	13.4	11	11.1	10	14.7
½ - 1	162	8.9	31	6.5	20	8.4	10	10.1	5	7.3
1 - 2	149	8.2	94	19.6	53	22.2	11	11.1	12	17.6
2 - 3	77	4.2	124	25.9	52	21.8	20	20.2	15	22.1
3 - 4	50	2.7	103	21.5	47	19.7	29	29.3	20	29.4
4 - 5	40	2.2	88	18.4	35	14.6	18	18.2	6	8.8
	1828		479		239		99		68	

Table 11.

The whereabouts of 973 children five years after admission.

	N = 150. Coloured boys. %	N = 113. Coloured girls. %	N = 404. White boys. %	N = 306. White girls. %
Returned Home.	36.0	40.7	50.7	45.4
Adopted.	6.7	11.5	19.8	23.5
In Foster Home.	16.0	25.7	6.9	7.2
In Institution.	40.0	22.1	20.5	22.9
Other.	1.3	0	2.0	1.0

Note. There are certain differences between the characteristics of the children admitted by the three societies and their methods of caring for them, but they have more in common with each other than with the local authority children's departments. Recently, however, one of the societies has come closer to the local authorities in its admission policy.

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